

IN THE DRAWINGS

In the Office Action the proposed drawing changes previously submitted were approved, and replacement sheets including the amendments have been attached at the end of this paper.

Attachment: Replacement Sheets with Changes

REMARKS

In the Office Action, claims 14 and 23 were allowed. Applicants thank the Examiner for allowing claims 14 and 23. Additionally, claims 2-4, 11, 12, 25 and 26 previously were withdrawn from consideration, and the remaining pending claims were rejected. Furthermore, objections were set forth with respect to the drawings and the specification.

By this Reply and Amendment, Applicants have attempted to place this application into condition for allowance. Claims 10, 15, 30 and 32-34 have been canceled without prejudice, independent claim 29 has been amended to clarify its language, and dependent claim 13 has been amended simply to change its dependency from claim 10 to claim 14. Upon entering these amendments, claims 1, 7-9, 13-14, 22-24, 27-29 and 31 remain pending. The claim amendments are fully supported in the specification and figures of the pending application.

In the Office Action, the drawings were objected to as failing to comply with 37 CFR 1.84(p)(5). Proposed drawing changes have been approved, and replacement sheets are attached at the end of this paper. Accordingly, the objection is believed overcome.

With respect to the specification, the Examiner objected to the form of the Abstract because the abstract was not submitted as a separate replacement page. Accordingly, a separate replacement sheet has been attached at the end of this paper, and the objection is believed overcome.

Claims 32-34 were rejected under 35 USC 102(e) as anticipated by the Schetky et al. reference, US Publication No.: 2002/0046840. Although this rejection is respectfully traversed, claims 32-34 have been canceled without prejudice to facilitate allowance of the present application. Accordingly, the rejection should be moot.

Claims 1, 7-10, 13, 15, 22, 24 and 27-31 were rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as unpatentable over the Schetky et al. reference in view of the Lohbeck reference, US Patent No.:

5,984,568. This rejection is respectfully traversed. However, independent claim 10 has been canceled, and independent claim 29 has been amended in an effort to obtain allowance of the present application. With respect to independent claims 1, 22 and amended 29, Applicants respectfully request the Examiner withdraw the rejection and allow these claims.

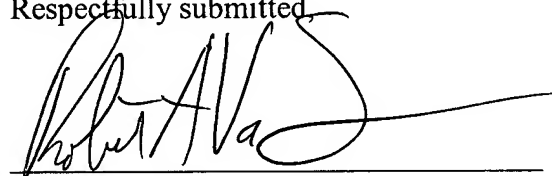
Apart from issues raised previously raised regarding the Schetky et al. reference, Applicants strongly disagree with the characterization and use of the Lohbeck reference. The Lohbeck reference discloses a connector assembly for an expandable slotted pipe that does not use interlocking extensions. Instead, the Lohbeck device secures lengths of tubing using short screws 44. As specifically stated in the reference: "To connect two lengths of tubing provided with the tubing connector assembly 20, the parts 22, 24 are brought together such that the free end 36 of the male part passes inside the free end 37 of the female part. The screws 44 are then secured in the holes 42, 43." (See column 3, lines 3-7). The Lohbeck reference simply does not disclose any type of interlocking extensions to hold tubular segments together but instead secures them together with separate screws. The fingers 40, 41, discussed in the Lohbeck reference, may accommodate expansion, but they do not interlock to connect the tubulars together. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit the Lohbeck reference does not support the rejection of these claims, and the rejection should be withdrawn.

By way of specific example, the references cited by the Examiner do not disclose or suggest a connector system for coupling first and second bistable expandable tubulars with a plurality of "interlocking extensions" where each receiving extension has "a connector opening with a narrow outer portion and a wider inner portion to interlockingly receive a corresponding insertion extension" as recited in independent claim 1. Similarly, the references do not disclose or suggest coupling a first tubular to a second tubular by "a plurality of interlocking extensions" as recited in claim 22. The references also fail to disclose or suggest means for coupling first and second bistable tubulars with "a plurality of interlocking extensions that automatically interlock upon linear movement of the first bistable tubular into engagement with the second bistable tubular" as recited in amended, independent claim 29. Accordingly, independent claims 1, 22 and 29, along with their dependent claims, should be condition for allowance.

Claims 1-4, 7-9 and 41-43 were rejected under the judicially created doctrine of obviousness-type double patenting as unpatentable over claims 1-9 and 20-24 of US Patent No.: 6,648,071. Applicants have enclosed a terminal disclaimer with this Reply and Amendment, and the nonstatutory double patenting rejection should be overcome.

In view of the foregoing remarks, the pending claims are believed in condition for allowance. However, if the Examiner believes certain amendments are necessary to clarify the present claims or if the Examiner wishes to resolve other issues by way of a telephone conference, the Examiner is kindly invited to contact the undersigned attorney at the telephone number indicated below.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert A. Van Someren', written over a horizontal line.

Robert A. Van Someren
Reg. No. 36,038

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PO Box 2107
Cypress, TX 77410-2107
Voice: (281) 373-4369